



Food Safety Environmental Practice

WHAT IS THE HEALTH ISSUE?

Foodborne diseases cause about 76 million illnesses, 325,000 hospitalizations, and 5,000 deaths in the United States each year. To address this issue, a systems approach that includes surveillance, outbreak response, laboratory diagnosis, and an active disease-prevention component is needed. This disease-prevention component complements CDC's health protection goals related to community preparedness, as well as those related to decreasing health risks associated with foodborne disease among persons in all stages of life. To prevent foodborne illness, the factors that set the stage for outbreaks and illness to occur must be understood.

WHAT HAS CDC ACCOMPLISHED?

In 2000, CDC, in collaboration with the Food and Drug Administration and eight states (California, Colorado, Connecticut, Georgia, Minnesota, New York, Oregon, and Tennessee), established the Environmental Health Specialists Network (EHS-Net), a network of environmental health specialists who work to improve environmental health. EHS-Net

- Designed a project to better understand food-handling practices and how these practices relate to the occurrence of foodborne illness.
- Identified factors that may influence the safety of food, including knowledge and hygienic practices of the people who prepare food, equipment used in the food-preparation process, and inherent qualities of the food itself. Data collected from evaluations are entered into an electronic database and analyzed to identify factors that are antecedents to foodborne disease. This information helps environmental health specialists determine the effectiveness of existing strategies and implement sustainable disease-prevention programs.
- Published a manuscript in 2004 about the prevalence of high-risk egg-handling practices in restaurants. Other manuscripts in progress focus on a better understanding of food-preparation and food-handling practice among food workers and managers.
- Developed a data collection system that will help public health officials better identify and assess environmental factors contributing to foodborne outbreaks and the prevention efforts needed to mitigate or eliminate them.

WHAT ARE THE NEXT STEPS

CDC is working collaboratively with federal, state, local, and tribal food protection programs; academic institutions; and partner organizations to implement effective food-safety practices. Through partnerships, CDC will continue to promote the use of EHS-Net data to modify local practices and create science-based regulations.